

On the Aversion of Men- of Taste

in the only right and safe relation to the Supreme Being, He suffers himself to pass the year in a dissatisfied uncertainty, and a criminal neglect of deciding, whether his cold reception of the specific views of Christianity will render unavailing his regard for those more general truths, respecting the Deity, moral rectitude, and a future state, which are necessarily at the basis of the system. He is afraid to examine and determine the question, whether he may with impunity rest in a scheme composed of the general principles of wisdom and virtue, selected from the Christian oracles and the speculations of philosophy, harmonized by reason, and embellished by taste. If it were safe, he would much rather be the dignified professor of such a philosophic refinement on Christianity, than yield himself a submissive and wholly conformed disciple of Jesus Christ. This refined system would be clear of the undesirable peculiarities of Christian doctrine, and it would also allow some different ideas of the nature of moral excellence. He would not be so explicitly condemned for indulging a disposition to admire and imitate some of those models of character which, however opposite to pure Christian excellence, the world has always idolized.

I wish I could display, in the most forcible manner, the considerations which show how far such a state of mind is wrong. But my object is to remark on a few of the causes which may have contributed to it.

I do not, for a moment, place among these causes that continual dishonour which the religion of Christ has suffered through the corrupted institutions, and the depraved character of individuals or communities, of what is called the Christian world. Such a man as I have supposed, understands what the dictates and tendency of that religion really are, so far at least, that in contemplating the bigotry, persecution, hypocrisy, and worldly ambition, which have been forced as an opprobrious adjunct on Christianity during all ages of its occupancy on earth, his mind dissevers, by a decisive glance of thought, all these evils, and the pretended Christians who are accountable for them, from the religion which is as distinct from them as the Spirit that pervades all things is pure from matter and from sin. In his view, these odious things and these wicked men, that have arrogated and defiled the Christian name, sink out of sight